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August 20, 1952

Dear Mr. Matthews:

Reference is made to your letter of 12 June 1952 requesting the views of the Department of Defense concerning an exchange of communication with the British Foreign Office on the subject of Albania.

The latest document in this series is the State Department memorandum of 10 June 1952, summarizing the areas of agreement and disagreement between the United States and United Kingdom in their respective views concerning Albania, and setting forth suggested procedures to meet both the United States and United Kingdom positions in regard to each remaining point of disagreement.

With the one exception noted below, the Joint Chiefs of Staff agree with those views of the Department of State, containing military implications, both in the area of agreement with the British Foreign Office and the area of remaining disagreement, noting that the views of the Department of State were drafted in full consideration of the informal views of an agency of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, namely, the Joint Strategic Survey Committee. With reference to paragraph 4, Section II of the Department of State memorandum of 10 June 1952, the Joint Chiefs of Staff are of the opinion that in their approach to Yugoslavia and Greece, the United States and the United Kingdom should urge those two Governments not to intervene in Albania, in the event of, or in the face of the imminence of, a Cominform attack on Yugoslavia or the fall of the current Albanian Government, without prior consultation with the United States and United Kingdom concerning the advisability of such interventions. In making such representations to the Governments of Yugoslavia and Greece, the inherent right of a nation to defend itself against actual attack, including the employment of counter-attack as a defensive measure, must be recognized. In arriving at this opinion, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were influenced by the belief that, from a military point of view, it is unlikely that Yugoslavia would be willing to permit Albania,

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a hostile nation of Kremlin orientation, to remain unattended on its flank in the event or imminence of a Cominform attack on Yugoslavia. As a practical matter the military occupation of Albania by Yugoslavia probably would follow in this eventuality unless Yugoslavia could be dissuaded by the United States and United Kingdom representations. For similar reasons, as well as for certain political considerations, Greece in all probability would wish to participate in that occupation. Further, it also appears plausible, in view of the vulnerability of the communist Albanian regime and the possibility of its fall, that both the Yugoslav and Greek Governments may be under strong inclination to effect the military occupation of Albania if that government should fall even though a Cominform attack on Yugoslavia is not imminent. Such intervention would be undesirable since it would deny the new regime an opportunity to prove itself friendly to the West.

Again with reference to paragraph 4, Section II, of the Department of State memorandum of 10 June 1952, it is considered likely that during the progress of the proposed military talks with Yugoslavia the United States-United Kingdom representatives will be able to sense a propitious time for a governmental approach to Yugoslavia and Greece concerning the matters discussed in paragraph 3 above.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff fully concur in the Department of State views and suggestions regarding the first of the unresolved points. In the face of the known attitudes of both Yugoslavia and Greece concerning an occupation of Albanian territory in the event of hostilities against Yugoslavia, any suggestion of a line of partition proferred by the United States and the United Kingdom concurrently with the representations to prevent any such intervention in Albania would serve only to detract from the force of the United States and United Kingdom effort to prevent this intervention. However, the Joint Chiefs of Staff agree that the United States and the United Kingdom should collaborate now in the selection of a suitable dividing line for a possible occupation of Albania by Yugoslavia and Greece. The Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that any knowledge of this action or any proposal for acceptance of such a line should be withheld from Greece and Yugoslavia until a joint occupation by those two countries, despite United States and United Kingdom representations to the contrary, becomes imminent.

The Joint

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The Joint Chiefs of Staff have noted the Department of State study on the subject of a proposed geographical line of demarcation between possible Greek and Yugoslavia zones of a joint military occupation of Albania by those two countries. The suggested criteria, upon which the selection of a line best conforming to United States interests should be based, are both political and military. The matter of selecting the optimum line resolves itself largely into a weighing of political versus military considerations.

After considering a line along the south bank of the Shkumbi River, representing the maximum Greek claim on Albanian territory in the past, and other lines farther south, such as the line representing the Greek national claim to Northern Epirus, the Department of State study recommends that a line running approximately east and west and about ten miles north of the Shkumbi River would represent the best compromise line of demarcation between Greek and Yugoslav occupational forces on the basis of the several political and military criteria set forth. The United States Embassy in Athens had previously advised the Department of State that this line represents a natural frontier between northern and southern Albania, apparently on the basis that the line generally coincides with the northern limit of the watershed of the Shkumbi River.

From the military point of view, and on either a short-term or long-term basis, a line of demarcation between military forces should, among other things, be:

a. Readily identifiable by natural geographical features; and

b. Such as to reduce to a minimum the probability of frictional incidents between the troops of the opposing occupational governments.

On the basis of these criteria, the Joint Chiefs of Staff are of the opinion that the center line of the Shkumbi River, appropriately extended eastward to the present Albania-Yugoslavia border, would offer distinct advantages as compared to the arbitrary line favored in the Department of State study. Historically, rivers have proved to be good international borders, which in many cases have been established initially as the limits of military occupations. The line favored by the Department of State study offers no such readily identifiable geographical feature; rather, it would have to be marked along the crest of a low rise of foothills. Either line would represent an approximate extension to the west of the present border between Greece and Yugoslavia, and for that reason would be a compromise more likely to be acceptable to the Yugoslavian and Greek Governments than a line appreciably farther north or farther south. Taking

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Taking all considerations into account, including the possibility that a military occupation of Albania by Greece and Yugoslavia might well persist for a protracted period and might even evolve into a permanent partitioning of Albania, the Joint Chiefs of Staff would favor the line of demarcation represented by the center line of the Shkumbi River from its mouth to its juncture with the Bishtrice River, thence the center line of the Bishtrice River to the point where it turns abruptly to the north, thence an east-west line to the present Albania-Yugoslavia border.

I concur in these views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and recommend that agreement concerning the Shkumbi River line of demarcation be sought from the British Government.

Sincerely yours,

/s/ Robert A. Lovett

Honorable H. Freeman Matthews
Deputy Under Secretary
Department of State

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